

# Exodus – Lesson 6

## Moses Returns to Egypt

### Read Exodus 4:18-6:13

- (a) Why do you think Moses said to *Jethro* what he did in 4:18? Why do you think *God* said to Moses what he did in 4:19?

Moses only tells Jethro that he wants to go back to Egypt to see if his “*brothers*” are still alive. This could mean that he wants to see if his siblings are still alive (i.e. Aaron), or if the people of Israel (i.e. his brothers by heritage) are still alive. In either case, Moses does not *quite* tell Jethro the truth: instead of telling Jethro that he has met God and that God has instructed him to go back to Egypt to free the Hebrews, Moses chooses to tell Jethro only *part* of the truth. His reasons may be 1) because he is afraid to tell Jethro the whole truth, or 2) he believes it is prudent to tell Jethro only what he needs to know. It is possible that Moses is *afraid* to hear what Jethro might say to him or that Jethro might try to talk him out of such an endeavor. God may be trying to mitigate Moses’ fear of returning to Egypt by telling him that everyone who tried to kill him is dead. This may be a clue as to why Moses didn’t tell Jethro the whole truth: out of fear, Moses may have only told Jethro something innocuous, but God calms him by removing any fear of those who may have sworn to kill him if he ever came back.

- (b) Compare 4:21 to Romans 9:14-18. Why would God harden Pharaoh’s heart to *prevent* him from releasing the Hebrews?

This is a very strange ploy on the part of God, at least as it is seen from a *human* perspective. After all, if God *wanted* the Hebrew people to be released from Egypt, it would seem logical that God would *soften* the king’s heart instead of hardening it against the very thing he wanted done. However, Paul gives us the reason in Romans 9: by hardening Pharaoh’s heart (over and over), God *proves* that he is the One in control of all things, and the release of the Hebrews is due to his power and mercy, and *not* that of Pharaoh. This is true in this situation, and in all situations in which God works. It is *especially* true in the area of eternal salvation: the work of saving a soul *must* be due to the grace and mercy of God himself, and *never* on the basis of what human beings can or will do. This is a central point of the redemptive story! To assume that salvation is something that we can “procure” from God on our own, or that everyone in the world is “entitled” to the salvation God makes available in Christ is to make an error regarding this truth. Salvation, although universally offered to all humankind, cannot be procured by *any* human being unless the Living God *softens* the heart and draws specific people to receive it. Pharaoh was a living example of this truth: although God intended to draw the Israelites to himself, he hardened Pharaoh again and again to show that the end result was *his* work, not Pharaoh’s or Moses’.

- (c) What *event* does God foretell Moses in 4:22-23? Why would this be necessary at this point?

God foretells of the *final* “plague” that would befall the Egyptians before Pharaoh would let the Hebrews go. Such a message was necessary here for a number of reasons: 1) such a message would console Moses during all of the prior plagues; Moses would not have to wonder what the final plague would be, so he could relax during each of the first ones and watch God’s power at work. 2) Such a message would demonstrate the *supernatural* power of God; the other plagues, although God-ordained, would appear as natural events (e.g. swarms of insects, cattle dying, etc.) This final “plague” would strike a human target, indicating its supernatural nature. 3) As these verses note, God considered the Hebrews his personal people, and the final plague would strike at the “*firstborn sons*” of Egypt as a *real* demonstration by God of this truth.

(d) What *correlation* is there between this prophecy and the words of God in Matthew 3:16-17?

In the Old Testament (or under the old covenant), God considered the people of Israel his *“firstborn son,”* his chosen people, the people he would call his own. However, under the new covenant, God sends his *“firstborn son”* (i.e. the Only Begotten One) to draw a people to himself as the new *“chosen people.”* Those who would *“listen”* to Jesus and follow him would now become the new people of God, and they would enjoy all of the benefits of being the children of God. However, it is important to remember that the Church (i.e. all of those who have followed Christ in faith) is *not* a replacement for Israel, but an *extension* of it. Paul makes it clear in Romans 11 (and other places) that Israel is still the special people of God, and that the Church, although now under the blessings of God, is only an extension of Israel *for the time being*. There will come a day when God will reestablish his promises to Israel and draw *both* Israel and the Church to himself as his children.

2. (a) Why does God seek to *kill* Moses in 4:24? For what reason(s) might Moses have *failed* to do what was required here?

Apparently Moses had failed to circumcise his son under the explicit instructions of God. It is possible (although it doesn't say so in the text) that God had instructed Moses to perform this act, but Moses had disobeyed God directly. This would explain why God suddenly becomes so angry with Moses that he sets out to kill him. It is possible that Moses had failed to do this because the Hebrews had *“lost”* this ritual as a part of their heritage or because Moses had been away from his own people for so long that he had forgotten about its importance. *Note:* it is interesting that this bit of historical information is included by Moses *immediately* after God's discussion of Israel as his *“firstborn son.”* The sign used by God with Abraham to seal this relationship was circumcision (see Genesis 17, esp. v. 14).

(b) Why is it *Zipporah*, Moses' wife, who performs the circumcision on their son? Why does she call Moses a *“bridegroom of blood?”*

After God seeks to kill Moses for not circumcising his son, it seems very odd indeed that this task would fall to *his wife*, rather than him simply doing it himself. However, it could be that it was Zipporah who *first* recognized that God had punishment in store for Moses for failing at this (or refusing to do so), and took matters into her own hands. She calls Moses a *“bridegroom of blood”* because of his *failure* to do what needed to be done, thus bringing a death sentence upon himself (i.e. the shedding of his blood).

(c) For what *purpose* was Aaron included in God's plan for Moses (compare 4:27-30 to 3:10-16)?

Because of Moses' complaint about being *“slow of speech,”* (see 4:10-17) God appointed Aaron to be the spokesman for the team. God may have capitulated to Moses in order to get Aaron involved, or he may have had a deeper purpose. Because the words that Moses/Aaron would speak to Pharaoh would be the words of God himself, and because these words would become the basis of the Hebrew's freedom, God saw the need for someone articulate to speak. After all *“faith comes by hearing,”* and God wanted to be sure that the message was clearly spoken. True, God told Moses that *he* would put the right words in Moses' mouth. However, because of Moses' hesitation to speak frankly for God, God turned this task over to Aaron who would speak confidently for him.

(d) How did the Hebrews *respond* to Aaron when they first heard the words of God and saw the signs? Why is this significant?

The first reaction of the people to Aaron's words was one of belief and worship. It is significant because this is the *first time* that God has spoken to them in over 400 years. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has come to them, through Moses and Aaron, to remind them of his concern for them and to reemphasize his promises made to them via Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is the *proper* response to all revelations of God made to human beings: to "bow down and worship" God is *always* the appropriate response to him, and it *must* characterize the life of *anyone* who has had a personal encounter with God. This is especially true of those who have met the Living God through Jesus Christ: to bow down before God and his Son is the *primary* response of believers, and it *must* characterize their entire life as those who have been *redeemed*.

3. (a) Reread 5:1-9. What is Moses' *first* request of Pharaoh? Is it *completely* true? Why or why not?

Moses requests from Pharaoh that the Hebrews be allowed to go into the "wilderness" to hold a "feast" to their God, a statement that is *partially* true. It is true that Moses desires for the Israelites to go and worship God in the wilderness (which is what will eventually happen at Sinai), but it is *not quite true* that they would *return* (which is what Moses seems to imply). It is *not possible* for God to lie, so Moses' statement to Pharaoh was *probably* of his own development: maybe he thought that asking Pharaoh for a brief sojourn in the wilderness would be better than coming right out and asking for their release. Certainly this makes sense: Pharaoh would be *much* more conducive to letting the Hebrews out for a short time over against a complete freedom, and Moses may have "softened" the request in order to get what he wanted in a roundabout way. Notice that Moses "increases" the pressure in his follow-up request (see v. 3): if Pharaoh will not let the people sacrifice to their God, God might cause trouble. This is good evidence that Moses is trying to "bargain" with Pharaoh.

(b) What is Pharaoh's initial *concern*? What does he *decree* in response? Why would he decree such a thing as a response (see 5:17)?

Pharaoh's initial concern is for the *work* being done. He is unfamiliar with the God of the Hebrews, and he has no concern for whatever "danger" they may be in if they don't make sacrifice to him. His real concern is with the quota of work the Hebrews must do, and he draws the conclusion that they must be *underworked* if they feel they can leave to go into the wilderness for a short time. So, he decrees a harder workload: they are to make their bricks without straw being *provided* for them; they must glean the straw themselves. This will remove *any* feeling amongst the Hebrews that they have the time to go and worship, and it will focus their attention *only* on their work.

(c) From 5:22-23, what is *Moses'* response to these events? From 6:1, *why* has God allowed this?

Moses, of course, blames God for sending him, believing that he has failed and that God has not done what he promised to do. But, in 6:1, God tells Moses that all of this is a plan: God will use these circumstances to demonstrate his power and his "*strong hand*." Pharaoh will be a *pawn* in the hand of God: God will use these difficulties to convince *both* the Egyptians and the Hebrews that *he* is the most powerful, and that Pharaoh is nothing more than an instrument in his hands.

(d) What *connection* is there between these events and Hebrews 12:3-11?

The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that *discipline* (i.e. difficulties and trials of all sorts) is heaped on the people of God *by God* in order that they might “*endure.*” God uses circumstances *of all kinds* to encourage his people to greater and greater trust in him, and the decree of Pharaoh is designed by God to force the people to turn to him for their deliverance, an act of faith. The same is true for believers: God does *not* bring only good things into the life of those he calls “*son,*” but also brings trials and tribulations in order that their faith and trust in him is strengthened. This is, of course, contrary to human nature: we look only for good things to come from God, and we often miss the point of *why* these things come. But, God’s purposes are greater than our understanding, and he works “*all things together for the good of those who love him*” including those things that are troubling.